WHAT IS A HUMAN BEING?

A HEIDEGGERIAN VIEW

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INTRODUCTION

I

An interest in human nature has long been a motive driving philosophical inquiry. In the ancient world it was associated most closely with the name of Socrates and with his claim that the most valuable knowledge is self-knowledge. In the modern period a distinctive kind of philosophical thought got under way with Descartes's attempt to show that rigorous scientific knowledge must be grounded in a new kind of self-knowledge. In the following century, David Hume published *A Treatise of Human Nature,* in which he dealt with all the major issues of philosophical inquiry as facets of that most general topic. Most notably, perhaps, Immanuel Kant argued that the domain of philosophy was defined by three questions – What can I know?, What ought I to do?, and What may I hope? – and that these questions are facets of the more general question, What is man?[1]

An interest in human nature can take many forms, and the questions in which it finds expression can range from such matters as the character of human motivation (Is altruistic conduct really possible?) to the prospects for human happiness (Can a man really be called happy before his life is complete?). Philosophers have asked questions like these, but they have been more interested in what differentiates human beings from other living things and generally from the natural world in which they live. The answer

1. *Immanuel Kant's Werke,* edited by E. Cassirer (Berlin: Bruno Cassirer, 1923), vol. VIII, *Vorlesungen Kants uber Logik,* p. 343. Another statement of this view of the "interest of reason," but without the fourth question about "man," can be found in *Immanuel Kant's Critique of Pure Reason,* translated by N. Kemp-Smith (London: Macmillan, 1958), p. 635.

they have most often given to such questions is that the distinctive features of human nature have to do with the mental functioning of human beings – more specifically, with their intellectual and moral powers. It has been widely agreed that if there is some respect in which human beings differ from even the higher animals, it must be their capacity for rational thought that makes the difference. Because it has not been clear to many philosophers how intellectual functions *could* be carried out by any of the organs of the body, these most distinctive capabilities of human beings, together with others, like perception, that are shared with animals, have typically been assigned to a part of a human being that is not part of the body. This part has been variously conceived as the soul and the mind; and the part of philosophy that addresses questions about the human essence, if there is one, is now usually called the "philosophy of mind."

This book is an essay in the philosophy of mind, although, paradoxically, it will turn out that the concept of mind itself has to be abandoned; and it will proceed under the auspices of the broadly humanistic conception of the business of philosophy suggested by the names I have cited. Hence, it stands in a somewhat skewed relation to the main tendencies in the practice of philosophy at the present time. If the philosophers I have mentioned and many others have understood the central business of philosophy as having to do with human nature, their views have certainly not gone uncontested. Socrates himself found his way to his view of philosophy only after the disillusionment he suffered as a student of those philosophers who were primarily interested in the explanation of natural processes and were, in his view, indifferent to the reasons why people live and act as they do. In our own time as well, there has been a good deal of skepticism about the special association between philosophy and human nature. To many, such an association is reminiscent of outmoded ideas of man as the center of the universe, and of the self-importance and complacency that such ideas are thought to inspire in those who hold them. Philosophies imbued with a sense of the special importance of things human are more likely, it is thought, to flatter than to expose human illusions, and to engage in edification rather than rigorous inquiry. At a time when the natural sciences are the accepted paradigms of knowledge and have achieved this status, at least in part, because they refuse to be edifying, philosophy can, on this view, ill afford to go on espousing such a conception of itself.

To these perennial objections to a conception of philosophy as human self-knowledge, there is often added another that appears to have a special appeal in our own time. It takes the form of a challenge to the assumption that there is something so remarkable about human nature that it deserves the special attention the Socratic conception of philosophy claims for it. In the background of this challenge, there is often a principled refusal to be impressed by the standard versions of the doctrine of human uniqueness

that have been current since the Renaissance. It is argued that whatever attributes are supposed to constitute a special human excellence, they can all be employed for evil purposes as well as for good and all too often have been so used. In a century of genocide, it is hardly surprising that the terrible negative possibilities of human nature should have almost replaced the traditional positive images of the being that is ultimately responsible for the horrors we have witnessed in our time. There is, it is true, often something polemical and tendentious in this antihumanistic temper of mind, and the conclusions it draws from the events of our time deserve closer critical scrutiny than they typically receive. However that may be, the result is an intellectual and moral atmosphere in which any attempt to revive a conception of philosophy that centers on the concept of human being has little plausibility or appeal.

Nevertheless, just such an undertaking is attempted in this study. The reasons why I believe it makes sense to embark on such an effort at this time are complex and can be fully set forth only by the argument of the book itself. In general, however, the considerations that favor such an enterprise may be said to stem from a reading of the history of modern, and especially twentieth-century, philosophy that is quite different from those that are most widely influential at the present time, especially in the English-speaking world. A brief account of these differences will, therefore, provide an introduction to my wider theme.

II

The great positive fact in the evolution of philosophy in the last few decades is commonly held to be the "linguistic turn" in the course of which philosophers have increasingly come to conceive their own inquiries as being concerned not with the nature of things in the old comprehensive sense but with language as the medium in which whatever we claim to know must be expressed. There have been many different accounts of the way this linguistic turn is to be understood; but in all of them, a line is drawn between language and its "logic," on the one hand, and "the world," on the other; and philosophy is regularly assigned to the language side of this distinction. This means that it cannot be any part of the proper business of philosophy to propound theses of its own about the nature of the world. If all philosophical questions are questions about language, then the contribution the philosopher can make to knowledge must take the form of an analysis from a logicolinguistic point of view of the concepts deployed in some area of inquiry. More specifically, when these concepts turn out to have logical peculiarities that raise questions about the coherence and intelligibility of any form of discourse in which they figure, it becomes the responsibility of the philosopher to propose an appropriate reform or reconstruction of the

language we use. If follows that although such a contribution to the progress of knowledge may be highly significant, it is almost certain to be indirect and to have a critical rather than a constructive character.

The disqualification of philosophy as a source of independent pronouncements about the world might have been expected to leave all areas of language use equally free to pursue their own distinctive business without undue fear of philosophical censorship as long as they did not fall into any gross incoherence. This was not, however, the way things went. The first sponsors of the thesis that identified philosophy with the logic of concepts were also committed to the view that only one form of thought – natural science – was largely free of the logical defects that philosophy made it its business to detect; and the language of science was accordingly assigned a privileged status *ab initio*. Other modes of thought that claimed to have something distinctive to say about the world but did not use the conceptual idiom of the natural sciences were sharply devaluated. Admittedly, over time, it gradually became apparent that there were serious difficulties in the way of any such postulation of a unique harmony between the logical criteria that philosophy brings to bear on the products of human thought and natural science as an exemplary theory of the world. Most notably, the attempt to define criteria of meaningfulness that would consign everything except the propositions of science to the status of the noncognitive and the emotive bogged down. It also became increasingly evident that there are many "languages" that elude classification in terms of such alternatives and that there is no simple test that can be used to judge the ontological claims of any language – any "conceptual system" – to represent the world as it "really" is. Considerations of this kind have raised doubts about the possibility of simply identifying the program and purposes of linguistic philosophy with those of natural science; and in some subsequent phases of this movement, a relativistic view of the competing claims of different languages to represent the world has found defenders. Nevertheless, a strong sense that the language and, with it, the ontology of natural science are somehow privileged has persisted among most adherents of linguistic philosophy.

One index of the continuing authority of science in ontological matters is the fact that the vicissitudes through which the relationship between linguistic philosophy and science has passed have not led to any significant reassessment of the mode of being of language itself. This issue is the more pressing since in the more science-oriented or naturalistic versions of linguistic philosophy, it is taken for granted that language use is an overt and observable function of the human organism and thus takes its place unproblematically within the same natural milieu as all the other processes with which the sciences are concerned. Indeed, one great attraction of the replacement of "thought" and "consciousness" by "language" in recent

decades has been the sense that these supposedly private and mysterious functions have finally been assigned their proper places in a public domain where claims of privileged access are disallowed. On the strength of such advantages as these, it tends to be simply assumed that language, particularly its distinctive semantic and referential functions, presents no special problem for a naturalistic account of human nature.[2]

If an inquiry were to be mounted into the mode of being of language, however, it is clear that it would have to question this assumption. It should also try to determine whether the place of language in human life does not have to be more deeply conceived than it is when we refer to ourselves simply as "language users." But instead of such an inquiry, there has been a pronounced tendency to treat language use conceived in this rather perfunctory way as the paradigm instance of mental activity generally, without troubling oneself further about such matters. In part, this is a result of a rule of method adopted by philosophers that says that, consistently with their abstention from first-order pronouncements about the world, they must confine what they say about perception or memory or imagination or any other mental function that might be supposed to be a necessary condition for language use to the language in which these functions would themselves be described or expressed. When this rule of method is rigorously adhered to, the utterances in question themselves can appear to constitute the domain of the mental, at least for all legitimate philosophical purposes. Equally important, on this view only the relevant natural science – in this case, psychology – is supposed to have the authority to talk about perception or memory as such. Accordingly, philosophy must not meddle in such matters, in which it has no special competence even though the psychological account that is given may be visibly guided by philosophical premises. Together, these procedural constraints under which linguistic philosophy conducts its business can harden into what amounts to a foreclosure of inquiry in areas of primary importance to philosophy. And through the refusal of philosophy to enter the lists against physicalistic theories of perception or thought, a substantive thesis about the nature of the mental may be tacitly ratified.

All of this is highly relevant to the question of what becomes of the concept of a human being in linguistic philosophy. Human beings have

2. As I try to show in some detail in later chapters, this is an excellent example of what Alfred Whitehead called "the fallacy of misplaced concreteness." It plays on the ambiguity between language as speech (or writing) – this is what is conceived of as "concrete" – and language as a modality of having a world, and thereby makes it appear that, for ontological purposes, all the "abstract" matters that fall under the latter heading can be subsumed under the former. The agenda implicit in this assimilation is naturalistic; and its great advantage is that it enables naturalistically inclined philosophers to deal with the issues of first philosophy and yet assure themselves that they have remained faithful to their ontology by treating these matters as being entirely "logical" or "conceptual" (and thus implicitly linguistic) in nature.

sometimes been called "language animals," and so it might have been reasonable to expect that in this new linguistic orientation of philosophy there would be a more positive attitude toward an interest in the concept of a human being. At the very least, the fact that by reason of their being "language users" the location of human beings on the map drawn in terms of the language–world distinction is ambiguous might have provoked more thought than it appears to have done. After all, language, if it is to be used, requires a speaker; and intuitively, at least, it is hard to see how that speaker, however conceived, could fail to be on the same side of the language–world distinction as the language he uses. In that event, however, since human beings are also in the world as one kind of entity among the many empirically determinable kinds that make up the world, they would have a dual status for which no provision is made by philosophies that build on the original distinction. Nevertheless, the special character of this status has not stimulated any renewal of philosophical interest in the concept of a human being. It is true that there has been a good deal of interest lately in the concept of the person; but the sources of this interest appear to lie mainly in moral philosophy, and even when that is not so, the ontological status of the person is left largely indeterminate.

There has been at least one significant dissent from the view that language, as the aspect of human nature that is of unique interest to the philosopher, can be abstracted from the wider context of human life without detriment to the inquiries initiated in this way. I am referring to the effort that has been made, especially on the part of those influenced by the later Wittgenstein, to show that there is a deeper connection between various modes of language use and some of the most general conditions of human life than is recognized in the standard view of these matters. Most notably, there has been an interest in the pragmatic dimension of language use – those features of it that have to be understood in terms of its relationship to its user – and this interest has led to the elaboration of a theory of speech acts. It seems fair to say, however, that for all its interest, the work done under this rubric has remained intralogical in the sense that it explores what is implicit in, and presupposed by, speech acts performed in certain contexts. These explorations do not contribute much, if anything, to a philosophical understanding of the kind of context that is presupposed by language use as such. Nor does it appear that those who work in the pragmatics of language have a stronger interest in the kind of entity that a human being is than their colleagues who devote themselves to the syntactic and semantic aspects of language.

This condensed account of what has been happening in philosophy during this century would benefit considerably from a longer historical perspective. Linguistic philosophy itself, especially in its earlier phases, was disinclined to take such a view, because it was full of a sense of having broken with the philosophical tradition and of constituting what was, in

effect, to be a new discipline free of the obsessive and sterile preoccupations of the past. As so often happens, however, those who think they have freed themselves from the influence of some tradition are the ones most likely to continue in it. In the case of linguistic philosophy, its short way with issues concerning the ontological status of language and its broader lack of interest in the concept of a human being can be shown to be continuous with a line of thought Western philosophy has followed throughout the modern period.

That line is the steady movement of modern philosophy since Descartes toward a transcendental conception of the human mind or, as it came increasingly to be called, the "subject." In that conception, the mind is understood no longer as a mental substance that is one of the entities that together make up the world but, rather, as the act of thought itself. This act is transcendental in the sense that it is a prior and necessary condition for any knowledge of objects at all, including what is referred to in this tradition as the "empirical self" – the self that has a particular identity and a locus in space and time. There has also been a strong tendency to conceive this transcendental condition more and more in logical rather than in psychological terms; and even Kant refers to the "I" that expresses the unity of thought and experience that is a condition of the possibility of empirical knowledge as a "logical act." It seems clear that in the contrast between a transcendental self so conceived and the domain of empirical objects, and in the disjunction between the transcendental and the empirical selves, we have the essential elements of the contrast that linguistic philosophy makes between language and the world. In both cases, the ultimate subject of experience and of knowledge is conceived in terms of a logical function that has become largely autonomous even though it is still nominally assigned to a person or self whose act it is supposed to be. There is, to be sure, this difference between the two conceptions that Kant evidently still thinks of this ultimate subject of experience as plural in a way that corresponds to the plurality of empirical selves. In the language–world contrast, however, language is singular and there is nothing at that (transcendental) level that corresponds to the plurality of the "users" of language. One could therefore say that the language–world distinction of linguistic philosophy takes the transcendental subject a step beyond either Kant or Husserl inasmuch as it abstracts from the fact of the plurality of subjects that those philosophers recognized at even the highest transcendental level. It does so, moreover, in favor of a unitary impersonal subject – language as such – to which it seems incongruous to attribute an action of any kind in the way one does to a subject that refers to itself as an "I."[3]

3. This aspiration has not been confined to the English-speaking philosophical world but has been shared by many philosophers on the European continent. On this topic, see Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, translated by L. Scott-Fox and J. M. Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), and K. O. Apel, *Toward A Transformation of*

This evolution in the concept of the subject is carried to a paradoxical conclusion in the physicalistic treatment of language use. What is thereby effected may be described as a final divorce of language as a semantic function that is the a priori constitutive condition for an experience of the world and the human beings whose "act" this condition has been supposed to be or, at least, to require. The result is that human beings come to be understood as subsystems within the comprehensive physical system that is the world; and language in its semantic and constitutive aspects no longer has any essential conceptual linkage with human beings as so conceived. No longer is there any entity that is qualified by a distinctive ontological character to be the "bearer" of language as a semantic and referential function; and so language may be said to have floated free of any ground it may have been supposed to have *in* the world. It does not, of course, simply pass off into the empyrean as a consequence of having been thus dispossessed; and one can hardly deny that its distinctive semantic function remains perfectly familiar to the very human beings – linguistic philosophers among them – from whom it has been conceptually detached. It is equally evident that, like everyone else, these philosophers must continue to count on this understanding of language in their own use of it. It is hard to see how they could do this if they were only engaging in verbal behavior or how, in these circumstances, they could refuse language in its strong constitutive aspect a place within their own natures.

The conclusion to which this brief historical excursion points is that, in its treatment of human beings, linguistic philosophy uses a concept of language as verbal behavior that is quite different from (and dubiously consistent with) the understanding of language as a semantic and referential function that is implicit in its own enterprise. As long as this peculiar duality remains unaddressed, there will be something inherently unstable about this conception of philosophy. That is not likely to happen, however, until it is recognized that the two components in the original inspiration of linguistic philosophy are, at the very least, independent of one another. On the one hand, this new kind of philosophy was supposed to confine itself to logical-conceptual matters in a way that does not require (and perhaps does not even permit) any real commitment about what kinds of entities there are in the world. On the other hand, there was a strong conviction that the natural sciences had an exclusive right to determine what the world is like. It is as though, on the strength of this second component of their creed, these philosophers had assigned a power of attorney to their scientific colleagues and were, as a result, committed to a view of their own nature as human beings (and more specifically as language users) that

Philosophy, translated by Glynn Adey and David Frisby (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980).

excludes much of their own implicit self-understanding from their official concept of human nature. The result is a philosophy that moves on two levels and associates an explicit physicalistic ontology with an implicit logicolinguistic transcendentalism.

Not only is it clear that this situation is extremely unstable, but there have also been signs recently that the working consensus on which the unity of linguistic philosophy depends may be breaking up. Significant defections from this consensus have been occurring in the direction of positions that in one way or another break the linkage between the two essential elements of linguistic philosophy. Some philosophers, for example, would associate philosophy much more closely with the actual work of the natural sciences and, in effect, abandon all pretensions to a transcendental, language-based independence of philosophy from these inquiries. It scarcely needs to be said that, under these auspices, the concept of a human being is interpreted in unambiguously physicalistic terms and that language use in all its culturally significant forms is absorbed into a more general theory of the functioning of organisms. Others, however, would resolve the tension between these dual commitments of philosophy to language and to the ontology of science in the opposite way, that is, in favor of language. They espouse a position that, in effect, repudiates the assumption that language requires either a world that it is to be about or a speaker who, as it were, sets it in motion. At any rate, there are now philosophers in this country who, under mainly French influences, are prepared to conceive language in a wholly autonomous manner that dispenses with references beyond language and with any "world" – physical or otherwise – that is not itself a creature of language. At the same time, these philosophers are even more hostile to the idea of a subject, however conceived, than are their scientistic colleagues; and this animus against the subject has, in association with certain political and cultural attitudes, become a virulent antihumanism.

III

If one is not prepared to accept either one of these positions or the unstable synthesis of the two from which they broke away, there is no alternative to a new inquiry into the status of this human subject that is now being slightingly treated by the major schools of thought. Such an inquiry would come under the heading of "philosophical anthropology" – a term much more familiar to European philosophers than to those in this country, where "anthropology" is the name of a social-scientific discipline that has no special philosophical character. To speak of philosophical anthropology is to claim that philosophy still has something to say about what it is to be a human being, and that at least this domain of "fact" has not been ceded to a corresponding empirical science. More specifically, in the tradition of

thought that I have in mind, the issues posed by a transcendental conception of the mind – the conception that in the hands of Descartes and Kant and Husserl dominates the modern period – are directly engaged instead of becoming the unspoken and unquestioned presupposition of both philosophical and scientific thought in the manner just described. It may be that because the transcendental status of thought had been so emphatically asserted and so widely accepted in European philosophy, the question about the existence – the locus in the world – of the subject that exercises these transcendental functions had to be explicitly dealt with and not simply finessed by identifying mind with language use. Certainly this is suggested by the fact that European philosophy has thus far remained largely immune to the attractions of physicalism as a philosophy of mind and more sensitive to the obligation to replace a transcendental concept of the mind with one that does not simply disallow every "mental' fact that might prove unincorporable into physicalism.

Two philosophers who made major contributions to this critique of transcendentalism, and to the effort to replace it with a more nearly adequate theory of human being, are Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty.[4] Their thought, and the broader phenomenological tradition on which they draw, will inform the argument of this book at many points; but my intention is not to offer a defense or even an interpretation of what they or others have said about the matters with which I deal. It is rather to carry forward the line of thought they so powerfully initiated, and to do so in a way that brings their theses into closer contact with a variety of contemporary philosophical concerns and challenges. The major element of continuity between their thought and the position I present in this book will be the ontological approach to questions in the philosophy of mind. Since that description by itself conveys little even to a reader with a background in the relevant literature, it may be helpful to make one or two preliminary points designed to anticipate objections to the use of the concept of ontology in this context.

In the philosophical tradition, ontology has been understood as the study of being qua being; and the way it studies being may be either "regional," to use a Husserlian term, or general. In the first case, the ontologist

4. I have already given an account of Heidegger's thought in my *Heidegger and the Philosophy of Mind* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989), and this book builds on the interpretation set forth there. With regard to the contrast between Heidegger's earlier and later thought and the affinities of this study with the one or the other, I hold, as I did in that book, to the thesis of the essential unity of Heidegger's thought in both periods and to the complementarity of the concepts of being and *Dasein* – in my terminology, which is itself borrowed from Heidegger, of presence and ek-sistence. See my essay *The Unity of Heidegger's Thought* in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 97–121. To this I would add that in the present stage of our relation to his thought, Heidegger greatly needs to be understood once again as a philosopher rather than as a mystagogue or a prophet.

addresses himself to entities of a certain kind – material objects, say – and attempts to characterize the "being" of those entities. Descartes, for example, explicated the being of nature in terms of the concept of extended substance. As a concept belonging to regional ontology, "human being" – the term I have used in the title of this book – would accordingly denote whatever turns out to be distinctive about this kind of entity. The question that arises for regional ontology in this sense is whether it presupposes a theory of natural kinds – some conception, that is, of things as having identities that are not simply stipulated by convention and that make them, as we say, the kinds of things they are. But if things do not have essences or sets of properties that make them what they are in this privileged sense, there will be no way of determining which one of the indefinitely numerous and various kinds to which an entity belongs constitutes its *being* in the strong sense that is required. In that event, the kind of ontological analysis that is supposed to define that being would inevitably take on a problematic aspect. Of course, one or another of these kinds may be conventionally designated as taking precedence over others for practical purposes of classification and description, but that fact alone does not confer any special ontological priority on the kind so designated.

General ontology, by contrast, is not primarily concerned with this or that kind of entity but rather with the import of the concept of being as such, wherever and however it is used. Traditionally, being in this sense has been conceived as a *summum genus* – the most general kind under which the regional concepts of the various classes of entities would be subsumed. But if the subkinds so subsumed have not been shown to express the being of the entities that fall under them in any special or privileged way, the status of the most general kind must be equally dubious. Heidegger argues, however, that this whole conception of being as such is profoundly mistaken, and that it goes wrong by associating the concept of being as such much too closely with that of entities and the kinds to which they belong, so that it finally becomes itself the concept of a superentity, that is, of God. A proper understanding of being as such can be achieved. Heidegger thinks, only through a radical contrast with entities that turns on the difference between a thing and a thing's *being* something – being something, that is, in the sense that gives rise to the notion of truth.

This contrast will be explained in much greater detail in the body of the book; it is introduced now only for the purpose of clarifying my use of the term "human being." The relevant point for this purpose is that, at least in the case of human beings, the notion of being as the kind of entity something is can be construed in a new way that links it with the conception of being as such that has just been briefly characterized. This is because human beings are, in fact, the entities for which entities generally are what they are and in fact are *überhaupt;* and human beings are thus the entities

that are familiar with being as such. The ontological approach to issues in the philosophy of mind is best characterized as the disposition to replace the concepts of "mind" and "consciousness" with this familiarity with being in all its modes as the defining character of human being. To speak about the being of human beings in this sense is not, therefore, just to light on one of their properties rather than another in order to dignify it, arbitrarily, as their essence in some honorific sense. It is rather to single out this familiarity with being as such (and thus with an order of truth as well) as a necessary preliminary to the exploration of its role in a variety of functions that are held to be distinctively human and that are usually described in psychological language. Accordingly, although I claim that this familiarity with being is indeed constitutive for human being, this claim is not based on a priori or intuitive grounds. It is based instead on the centrality this familiarity with being can be shown to have in the full range of human functions considered in this book.

What has just been said also makes it possible to respond to those who may be surprised to see ontology of the Heideggerian type associated with any project that is well disposed toward humanism. Heidegger was the author of a famous *Letter on Humanism* in which he strongly condemned a kind of philosophical thought about human beings that might appear to have marked affinities with what I have just been proposing.[5] It would not be appropriate to give the details of Heidegger's argument at this point, but it can be noted that what he censures in the philosophical anthropology of the past is a failure to raise the right kinds of questions about the ontological character of the entity – man – that is at issue, and a resultant tendency to assimilate its mode of being to that of other kinds of entities in a way that misses what is distinctive about human beings. What is missed is precisely the implication of human beings in being as such that was touched on previously. Because, in Heidegger's view, the term "humanism" has been so closely associated with this tendency and with the uncritical ontological assumptions that go with it, he no longer has a positive use for it. At the same time, it is clear that he does not repudiate the idea itself of an inquiry into what he is still willing to call in a positive sense the "*humanitas* of the *homo humanus*." What emerges as the principal implication of this critique of philosophical anthropology is not so much a rejection in principle of every such undertaking as it is a thesis about the way it must be conducted. Heidegger insists on the requirement that the level at which this inquiry is pitched must differ from that of the usual definitions of a human being as an *animal rationale*. This is not because man is not a

5. Martin Heidegger, "Brief über den 'Humanismus,' " in *Wegmarken* (Frankfurt am Main: V. Klostermann, 1967). Those who still harbor doubts about Heidegger's interest in human beings will find it much in evidence in the talks he gave to Swiss medical students in the 1960s. These were published in *Zollikoner Seminare*, edited by Medard Boss (Frankfurt am Main: V. Klostermann, 1987).